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IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend produced by the method comprising:

in a first step, forming a fire retardant mixture comprising a non-halogenated fire retardant, poly(arylene ether) resin, and a polystyrene resin essentially free of plasticizer by intimately mixing in melt;

in a second step, forming a non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend by intimately mixing in melt the fire retardant mixture with a blowing agent wherein the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend is in the form of pellets; and

in a third step, expanding the non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend.

2. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1 wherein the blend produces a sound level less than or equal to about 60 decibels when the skin surface of a 2.5 cubic centimeter sample is rubbed across a clear coated test panel with a constant pressure of about 2-2.5 kilo Pascals.

3. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1 wherein the poly(arylene ether) has an intrinsic viscosity of about 0.1 to about 0.6 deciliters per gram as measured in chloroform at 25°C.

4. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1 wherein the poly(arylene ether) is present in an amount of about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition and the amount of polystyrene is about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition.

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5. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1 wherein the polystyrene has a molecular weight less than or equal to about 240,000 atomic mass units.

6. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1 wherein the fire retardant mixture further comprises a nucleating agent.

7. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1, wherein the fire retardant mixture further comprises an impact modifier.

8. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1, wherein the non-halogenated fire retardant comprises butylated triphenyl phosphate ester, resorcinol tetraphenyl diphosphate, bis-phenol A tetraphenyl diphosphate, or a mixture of two or more of the foregoing.

9. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expanded poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 1, wherein the blowing agent comprises a pentane isomer or a mixture of pentane isomers.

10. (Currently amended) An expanded poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend produced by the method comprising:

in a first step, forming a first mixture comprising poly(arylene ether) resin, and polystyrene resin essentially free of plasticizer by intimately mixing in melt;

in a second step forming an expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend by intimately mixing in melt the first mixture with a blowing agent wherein the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend is in the form of pellets; and

in a third step, expanding the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend.

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19. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 17 wherein the poly(arylene ether) is present in an amount of about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition and the amount of polystyrene is about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition.

20. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 17 wherein the polystyrene has a molecular weight less than or equal to about 240,000 atomic mass units.

21. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 17, further comprising an impact modifier.

22. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 17, wherein the blowing agent comprises a pentane isomer or a mixture of pentane isomers.

23. (Currently amended) A non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend comprising poly(arylene ether) resin, polystyrene resin essentially free of plasticizer, a non-halogenated fire retardant, a nucleating agent and blowing agent wherein the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend is in the form of pellets.

24. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 23 wherein the poly(arylene ether) has an intrinsic viscosity of about 0.1 to about 0.6 deciliters per gram as measured in chloroform at 25°C.

25. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 23 wherein the poly(arylene ether) is present in an amount of about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition and the amount of polystyrene is about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition.

26. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 23 wherein the polystyrene has a molecular weight less than or equal to about 240,000 atomic mass units.

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33. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 30 wherein the polystyrene has a molecular weight less than or equal to about 240,000 atomic mass units.

34. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 30, further comprising an impact modifier.

35. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 30, wherein the blowing agent comprises a pentane isomer or a mixture of pentane isomers.

36. (Original) The expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 30 wherein the first mixture further comprises a nucleating agent.

37. (Currently amended) A non-halogenated, fire retardant expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend produced by the method comprising:

in a first step, forming a first mixture comprising poly(arylene ether) resin, polystyrene resin essentially free of plasticizer, and a non-halogenated fire retardant by intimately mixing in melt; and

in a second step forming an expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend by intimately mixing in melt the first mixture with a blowing agent wherein the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend is in the form of pellets.

38. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 37 wherein the poly(arylene ether) has an intrinsic viscosity of about 0.1 to about 0.6 deciliters per gram as measured in chloroform at 25°C.

39. (Original) The non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly (arylene ether)/polystyrene blend of Claim 37 wherein the poly(arylene ether) is present in an amount of about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition and the amount of polystyrene is about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition.

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47. (Original) The precursor composition of Claim 45 wherein the poly(arylene ether) is present in an amount of about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition and the amount of polystyrene is about 5 to about 95 weight percent, based on the weight of the composition.

48. (Original) The precursor composition of Claim 45 wherein the polystyrene has a molecular weight less than or equal to about 240,000 atomic mass units.

49. (Original) The precursor composition of Claim 45, further comprising an impact modifier.

50. (Original) The precursor composition of Claim 45, wherein the blowing agent comprises a pentane isomer or a mixture of pentane isomers.

51. (Original) The precursor composition of Claim 45 further comprising a non-halogenated fire retardant.

52. (Currently amended) A non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend produced by the method comprising:

in a first step, melt mixing independent components comprising a non-halogenated fire retardant, poly(arylene ether) resin, and a polystyrene resin essentially free of plasticizers to form a fire retardant mixture;

in a second step, forming a non-halogenated, fire retardant, expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend by intimately mixing in melt the fire retardant mixture with a blowing agent wherein the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend is in the form of pellets.

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53. (Currently amended) An expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend produced by the method comprising:

in a first step, melt mixing independent components comprising poly(arylene ether) resin and polystyrene resin essentially free of plasticizer by intimately mixing to form a first mixture; and

in a second step forming an expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend by intimately mixing in melt the first mixture with a blowing agent wherein the expandable poly(arylene ether)/polystyrene blend is in the form of pellets.